

Metaphorical Expressions in Contemporary English Poetry: A Syntactic Analysis of Some Selected Poems

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Abstract:

A metaphor is a type of figurative language abounds in everyday conversation especially in poetry and literature in general. Hornby (2003:498) defines metaphor as "a figure of speech in which a name or a descriptive term is transferred to some object different from but analogous to that to which it is properly applicable".

In other words, a metaphor is usually described as an implicit statement that one concept is another concept. It enables the speaker to convey a deeper meaning or a specific connotation of a word by comparing two things that are not logically related.

Though metaphors are context-sensitive, yet at the same time they are abstract models related to language because they are originally linguistic structures.

The study aimed at analyzing the metaphor from linguistic perspective, identifying the different linguistic patterns carry the metaphor and to show the linguistic behavior of the metaphor. In the light of these aims, the study presented different hypotheses; the most important one is that Metaphor takes different types and different linguistic structures by which the poet ornaments his poem to affect the recipient.

Key words: metaphorical expressions, syntactic analysis, contemporary English poetry

INTRODUCTION

The title suggests that the study is descriptive in its nature; it concerns with the stylistic discipline from applied linguistics perspective. The title shows that the spinal of the study is metaphor, which is an aspect of figurative language. The study is an attempt to present and explain the syntactic analyses of metaphors that are in common use in English poetry, specifically the contemporary English poetry.

The title also manifests that the study deals with the metaphor from a linguistic perspective as it is originally a linguistic structure. Furthermore, the title reveals a correlation among three main concepts: literal language, figurative language and linguistic structure. It can be said that the relation joins them is a dialectical relation in which no concept can be separated from the others.

THE PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

Poets are always searching for effective and precise structures to express themselves, their ideas or their intention to the reader (mostly to remedy corruption in the society or to deal with emotional state). The reader, on the other hand, wants to enjoy the theme of the poem, so he makes his best to interpret the poem for the sake of satisfying the needs of his feelings in terms of sentiments, emotions and romantic senses which can be obtained from the poem.

The precise way to achieve the above mentioned goal is metaphor, but the problem is that the metaphor can take different grammatical structures, but not specific form\pattern just like for example passive voice. On the side of the student, these different structures can be interpreted through various approaches depending on his\her comprehension, which sometimes, hinder a proper understanding of the poets'

intention, the poets' proposition or to capture the poem's central idea. In other words, the student, in a way or another, may not be able to get the poet's intention because of the student's confusion among different grammatical structures that are carrying metaphor. To the purpose of the current study, this is the first dimension of the problem.

The researcher has acquainted with different poetic examinations applied on the students of the first year at Al-Yarmouk University College; he found that 85% from the students were not able to answer the items related to metaphor. The students confessed that they face many difficulties in understanding the metaphor because the problem resides in how to recognize it. The researcher inferred that the students' problem lies in understanding the meaning of metaphor and how to distinguish between literal and literature meaning. It may be said that the students may confuse in dichotomizing between merely expressions to fulfill the poem and metaphorical expressions as a sense device used in poetry for specific purpose.

In other words, the student, in a way or another, may not comprehend the metaphor because of the unconnected relation and even sometimes a contrasted relation between the two described or compared objects. As so, comprehension is the second dimension of the problem.

The researcher designed a questionnaire distributed randomly on (100) students at first year, English departments from three different colleges at Diyala province, Republic of Iraq (College of Education for Humanities, Al-Yarmouk University College and Bilader-Rafidain University College) and he found that 83% from the students face a serious problem in dealing with metaphor in terms of linguistic and literature and how to determine the metaphoricalness of the expression. So, it can be inferred that the third dimension of the problem is recognition.

The researcher interviewed (10) instructors who specialized in poetry to discuss the existence of this problem, he found that 80% agreed that the distinction and the analysis of metaphor represent two serious problems to their students because they lack the clear vision to distinguish the metaphor device from other devices.

Moreover, that 100% from the instructors argued that they are able to distinguish the metaphor but admitted that they themselves face the problem of presenting metaphor in classroom in spite of the considerable efforts they conduct. As so, for the students, distinction and analyzing is the fourth dimension of the problem, and the method of presenting metaphor in classroom is the fifth dimension of the problem.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

The study aims at:

- 1- studying the poetic metaphors from syntactic perspectives,
- 2- identifying the syntactic peculiarities of metaphors, and
- 3- showing the syntactic structure and behavior of metaphors and the way of interpreting them.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is an attempting to tackle metaphors linguistically, namely analyzing the metaphor from linguistics point of view to identify its linguistic features and properties. As so, it is significant for those who are interested in the field of literature especially poetry and linguistic scholars who are interested the language in general and figurative language (metaphors) in particular and also to the instructors who teach literature to

know perfectly how to identify and present the metaphor to their students.

HYPOTHESES

The study hypothesized that:

- 1- Metaphor is an issue of thought not merely of language and used in poetry to achieve a clear and vivid picture for the sake of understanding and enjoyment,
- 2- Metaphor manifests in different types and can take different linguistic structures, so the poet tends to adorn and ornament his poem by using precisely different types and patterns to affect the recipient, and
- 3- The generation of metaphor is related to the characteristics of the two compared objects, while the transferring of the sense and image from one object to another takes place intuitively.

DATA AND LIMITS OF THE STUDY

The data and the samples of metaphors in question are all derived from some selected poems of some well-known English contemporary poets. They are (10) poems selected from (8) poets who are still alive.

Proposition

Syntactic analysis of metaphor falls into two parts: the first deals with the syntactic structure that tackles the patterns of the metaphor while the second tackles the syntactic behavior of metaphor.

FIRST: THE SYNTACTIC PATTERN OF METAPHORS

Metaphors are of different patterns, each one has specific features that distinguish it from others. They might be classified as follows:

Pattern 1: X + BE + Y (Be Pattern)

To some extent, this pattern of metaphor is a problematic. Here the metaphor is created by the virtue of the verb "be" with the item filling the "Y" gap. For example:

1- Tomisa pig

X be NP

2- Jack and John are monsters

X be NP

3- The debate is tall

X be Adj. p

4- The man was under fire

X be Adv.p

The problem is that several confusing points can be noted here. First, the predicate can contain metaphor because the subject is something purely literal and has a direct reference. Usually (X) is something that can be evaluated or judged.

Second, metaphor in this pattern is created by the **BE** part because it is the element that links X to Y. The (Y) in this pattern can be realized in different forms such as: NPs, Adj.P or Adv.P and in different shapes such as: singular, plural, premodifiers or even post modifiers.

Pattern 2: Subject + predicate:

This is another pattern of metaphor presentation that is created between the subject and the predicate, for example:

5- The invisible worm has found thy bed

Sub.

Pred.

There are some points to be noticed here in dealing with this pattern of metaphors. First, the subject is usually not humanized, but is given a human characteristic to be able to perform the action denoted by the verb of the predicate which is an essential component for the creation of the metaphor. Second, neither the subject nor the predicate have any metaphorical feature in isolation. Third, there is a sort of relation between the subject and the verb of the sentence as if they were internally linked or one selects the choice of the other as a partner. Finch (2000:177) calls this phenomenon as "selection restrictions".

Pattern 3: Verb + complement:

The observation here is that the verb requires only a complement for the metaphor's creation with or without other optional adjuncts. So they have the form of the following patterns:

Pattern 3-1: Verb + complement + (Optional Adjuncts)

The creation of metaphor in this pattern is restricted to the verb and its complement. To illustrate, see the following example and consider the optionality of the adjuncts:

6- I breathe the air of freedom since two years.

'**Breathe**' needs only the help of '**air of freedom**' to create the metaphor whereas 'since two years' is not necessarily to be mentioned. The adjunct has nothing to do in creating the metaphor and is of no value in this respect; even it can be deleted without affecting the metaphorical status of the sentence.

Pattern 3-2: Verb + Complement + Adjunct

This is another pattern of metaphor that requires obligatory adjuncts as shown in the example below:

7- He is **raining again with generosity**

It can be noticed that the verb '**raining**' with the complement '**again**' creates no metaphor because this alone will have literal meaning. Metaphor can be recognized only when the verb occurs with the adjunct '**with generosity**'.

The realizable thing here is that the nature and structure of the complement is totally determined by the verb. Tallerman (1998:96) states that the verb is the element which selects different types of complement. This concept made linguists classify verbs mainly according to the complements they select.

Intransitive verbs (carry, arrive, flow, etc.) take no direct object. These verbs can create metaphors only with their subjects not with complements, but they may be attached by an adjunct within the VP as in:

8- A train of hot feelings from Susan **arrived** two minutes ago.

The intransitive verb "**arrived**" needs no direct object to make the metaphor understandable, and the noun phrase "two minutes ago" acts as an adverb describing when the train arrived. Whereas transitive verbs, on the other hand, are incomplete without direct object, as in:

9- A. The eye of the sky **witnesses** (incomplete)

9- B. The eye of the sky **witnesses** the latest virtue (complete)

In this example, the verb "witness" is used transitively and takes the noun phrase "the latest virtue". Many verbs can be either transitive or intransitive, depending on their context. In the following pairs of sentences, the first sentence uses the verb transitively and the second uses the same verb intransitively:

10-A. The nostalgia **moved**. Intransitive and takes no direct object.

10-B. Spring moved all the feelings. Transitive takes a direct object.

Ditransitive is another class of verbs. Verbs like (give, send, buy, sell, make, find, tell, write, ask, build, teach, feed, Pay, etc.) have two complements, either a NP + Prep.P, or two NPs, as in

11- She gives Toma warm feelings

Occasionally, Tallerman (1998:96) states that there are some verbs take a NP + Prep.P but not two NPs such as (put), as in

12- The princess put her heart in the hands of the fate

Verbs like **rely and dive** take only a Prep.P as a complement as in:

13- The merchants are pressed to dive into moneymaking

Pattern 4: The Noun Phrases (NPs)

It is easy to identify NPs since their structure consist of a noun, whereas all the words round it belong to that noun. The noun itself is called the head which is obligatory. It is the element that bears the crucial semantic information, it determines the meaning of the entire phrase (Tallerman,1998:90).

The other words are considered as optional dependent. These dependents, in one way or another, modify the head; therefore they are sometimes called modifiers. Some of these dependents precede the head (premodifiers which comprises all the modifying or describing constituents before the head) while others follow the head (postmodifiers which comprise all the modifying elements placed after the head). However, there are different types from this pattern:

Pattern 4-1: Noun Phrase (NP)

Let us see the following example:

14- Struggle of civilizations

This example confirms that NP2 (civilizations) is the metaphorical topic, to be evaluated or tackled through metaphorical expression. Accordingly, NPs alone can create metaphor.

Pattern 4-2: Pre + NP + Post

This type is consisted of a noun as the main part of the expression surrounded by other elements to clarify the meaning, for example:

15- They are bees in working

The word "bee" is the principle word in this metaphorical expression, whereas all the other elements are pre- and-postmodifiers.

Pattern 4-3: NP + of + NP

This type consists of two NPs linked by (of). Below are some examples:

16- The flood of love

17- The tie of marriage

Note the structure of the complements '**The flood of love**' and '**The tie of marriage**'. They consist of (NP1 + of + NP2). Moreover, in these examples, the two structures are totally parallel in the sense that NP1 contains the definite article (the\the) and the noun (flood\tie), while the NP2 (love\marriage) is without definite article, and it means the thing to be evaluated through the metaphor, i.e. NP2 is the metaphorical topic.

Pattern 4-4: Association of Noun and Verb

It is easy to find N or NP associated with verb creates metaphorical expression. Let us consider the examples below:

18- Well, world, you have **built faith** with me.

19- It **rains frogs**.

First, the minimum NP consists of a single noun which might be concrete as **frogs** or abstract as **faith**. These two single nouns which are the head of two NPs form the metaphor with their verb. As so, it can be concluded that it is possible to have a noun that is forming a NP which in turn creates a metaphor with the verb. The finding here is that NPs might be metaphorical with\without the verb.

Pattern 5: Article (Definite / Indefinite / Zero) +Adjective + Noun

This is another pattern of structuring metaphor. Consider the following examples:

20- She smoothly entered **the closed heart**.

21- He has to protect **a newborn love**.

22- To win this match, the coach needs **brave lions**

Two points can be noticed in these examples: The first is that the NPs do not need the verb for the metaphor construction or realization. Their structure is almost the same except in the case of their article (definite, indefinite or zero) which does not lead to any remarkable difference in this context. The second point is that the majority of head nouns in these examples are clear and it is the adjective that creates the metaphor in correlation with noun.

The meaning of **heart** (in 20) and **love** (in 21) are so clear when they are examined in isolation, but with the adjectival (the closed in 20) and (a newborn in 21) the case differs because it turns into a metaphor, since heart is not a

room with closed door and love is not baby to be born. In (22: brave lions) the meaning is clear in isolation but within the context, it gave a metaphorical predication about the players.

Pattern 6: Adjective + Noun

This is another pattern of metaphor structuring. The following examples have this form:

23- They are on a **weak relation**.

24- They kill with **cold blood** .

It is easy to recognize that nouns alone are not metaphorical, but, once the adjective is added, metaphor emerges. The metaphor in these examples comes from the oddity of the relation between the adjectives and the nouns they modify. For example, it is an odd relation that constructed between the adjective cold and the noun blood.

Pattern 7: The Prepositional Phrase (Prep.P)

According to this metaphorical realization the prepositional phrase is non-headed construction since no one constituent functions as the center of the phrase. Instead, the structure is divided into two functional components (the preposition followed by its complement).

Concerning the prepositional phrases in which the metaphorical expressions frequently appear, the study focuses on three common prepositions: **in**, **on**, and **at** as a sample to fulfill the requirements of the study. The most common complements of the undertaken prepositions are NP or NP + of. This part deals with the Prep.P metaphors that are not related to verbs or not parts of VPs.

Pattern 7-1: At - Preposition

25- The time of tourism is **at the top of the summer** .

26- He talked about her **at the height of his passions** .

These Prep.Ps are introduced by (at), but their complements differ in structure. In (25 and 26), the complements are realized by NP + of + NP. In both examples the first NP consists of a determiner (the) and the noun (top/height), the second NP (after the preposition 'of') is somehow different. In example (25) the second NP consists of a determiner (the) and the noun (summer) whereas in (26) the second NP consists of the pre-modifier (his) and the noun (passions).

Pattern 7-2: In - Preposition

Let us examine the following examples which are introduced by the preposition (in):

- 27- She reformed everything **in the wake of the conscious.**
28- I am studying for the Ph. D. degree **in the heart of As-Sudan.**

In these examples, the complements are also realized by (NP + of + NP). In (27 and 28) the first NP consists of the determiners (the\the) and the nouns (wake\heart), while the second NP in (27) consists of the determiner (the) plus the modifier (conscious), but in (28) the second NP consists of a single noun (As-Sudan).

However, the complement of the metaphorical prepositional phrases introduced by (in) can also be produced by NP as in the following examples:

- 29- Al-Khartoum is **in the heart.**

In this example, the complement of the preposition (in) consists of a NP. The NP complement consists of the determiner (the) and the noun (heart).

Pattern 7-3: On - Prepositional

The following example is concerned with the preposition (on):

30- What he did, was **a critical step on the path** of successful.

Here, the complement of the preposition **on** is a NP which consists of the determiner **the** and a noun **path**.

SECOND: THE SYNTACTIC BEHAVIOUR OF METAPHOR

It is well known that metaphor is realized by more than one linguistic item and from different grammatical categories such as NP, VP, Adj.P, Adv.P, or Prep.P. The significant issue is that: can the metaphor move to different positions with keeping its metaphorical nature? Is metaphor subject to grammatical rules? Can metaphor be modified?

Concerning this issue, Jackendoff (1997:167) classifies VP into fixed and mobile, and he presents some examples to ensure whether or not they have a metaphorical semantic composition:

31- Jack **kicked the bucket**.

32- The bad guys **flew the coop**.

Jackendoff claims that these are fixed and non-mobile metaphorical expressions because they do not have property of metaphorical semantic composition. He argues that this is because their meaning is single and simple. They can be replaced by a lexical item. For example **kicked the bucket** means (die) and **flew the coop** means (escape).

To explain the mobile expressions, Jackendoff presents the following examples:

33- The partners **drew the line** of their partnership.

34- Jack **pulled the carpet** from under his enemies.

Jackendoff believes that these are mobile metaphorical expressions because they have the property of semantic

composition. **Drew the line** means: establish, define, limit, and so. **Pulled the carpet** means: dominate, control, overrule, and so.

Jackendoff's criterion for this classification is that expressions can occur in a range of contexts that he will use as diagnostic for mobility. This includes passive sentence. Let us consider the following examples:

35-The line of partnership was drawn between the partners.

36- The carpet pulled from under enemies.

Horn (2003:245) states that "the property of metaphorical semantic composition can be replaced by thematic composition and that this property is a sufficient condition for mobility". Horn points out that a closer inspection of the mobile idioms that have thematic composition reveals that they fall into two subtypes: 1-expressions that have a property of mobility of interpretation, and 2- expressions that do not have this property.

Horn (2003:249) states that if the metaphorical semantic composition property is replaced by thematic composition property, it is possible to distinguish between fixed and mobile expressions. Horn defines thematic structure as the set of semantic roles that a verb assigns to its NP arguments. He adds that an expression has thematic composition if the thematic structure of the verb in its literal sense and that the verbs in their idiomatic sense are identical.

The verb **draw** (in 129), in its literal sense, assigns one delineates or establishes a physical boundary or limit, while in **draw the line**, the verb figuratively assigns one establishes or delineates an abstract boundary or limit. Similarly, in **pulled the carpet** the verb also has this property. In (pilled the carpet) the verb in its literal sense means, one physically performs the action of pulling a certain piece of fabric to make the person on it fall down, but when a

person pulls the carpet in a figurative sense, one assigns something in an abstract way. In other words, one does something to dominate the other(s). In both cases, the semantic role assigned to the argument is "thematic".

It can be concluded that metaphorical expressions that have thematic composition are mobile or have mobility to some degree, whereas the metaphorical expressions lacking this property (thematic) are non-mobile.

In this sense, there are some metaphorical expressions that are fixed or rigid. In other words, they are not controlled by the rules of pluralization, passivization and interrogation. Thus, this group is considered to be fixed metaphors, in that they appear only in one form and they do not allow any other form or any appearance in any other structure. This can be illustrated as follows:

FIRST: METAPHOR AND PLURALIZATION

37- He shot a silver bullet that finished the debate

The above example is presented to be examined in terms of singularity. **Bullet** can occur only in singular form. Changing it into plural, the metaphoricity would be abrogated as it is clear in:

38- *He shot a silver bullet+s that finished the debate

Similarly, some other plural forms accept no changing in their plurality as in (She is wearing the Spring's colors) but not>(*She is wearing the Spring's color+0).

The following examples are concerning the idea of fixed metaphor:

39- That was the most pleasant furling in the long run.

40- He is at the height of the success.

These examples are fixed; neither the preposition can be changed nor the article, otherwise the metaphoricity is lost again as in (*on the long run) or (* on the height of the success). On the other hand, there is another group of mobile metaphorical expressions (changed, modified and subject to grammatical rules). Metaphor of this type appears in forms depending on the syntactic structure and other adjacent elements, as in:

41- He **took stupid decisions** to solve the problem.

42- They entered **fruitful discussions**.

The verb took in (139) can appear as take, takes and taken depending on what fills the subject slot and the tense of the sentence. These conjugations have no influence on the metaphorical nature of the expression. Furthermore, in the same example the head noun (**decisions**) can appear in singular form (**decision**) without any changing of its metaphoricity. The same property is applicable to example (140). Mobile metaphors, in this sense, allow some choices of singularity and plurality.

SECOND: METAPHOR AND INTERROGATION:

This is another criterion for mobility or non-mobility of metaphors. Let us consider this group of metaphors:

-A- Trust represents **the foundation** of trade.

B- What does the trust represent?

This question is syntactically well-formed, but the problem is that it questions about item having a literal sense in the sentence rather than to be question about the metaphorical expression. So this type of metaphors resists being questioned, and this is the type which can be called '**fixed metaphors**'.

In this criterion, on the other hand, there are mobile metaphors that allow either the whole metaphorical expression or a part of it to be questioned; this is illustrated in the following examples:

44- The merchants are **playing their own games** perfectly.

A. What do the merchants play perfectly?

45- James **started hunting for the opportunity** .

A. What did James start doing?

B. What did James start hunting for?

The examples above reveal that the metaphorical expression can be questioned as a whole or part. So they are mobile expressions.

Depending on the syntactic realization, some other metaphorical expressions can be realized by Prep.p. These metaphors also have the property of mobility, as in:

46-**Baghdad lives in his heart.** (Or) He lives **in the heart of Baghdad.**

A. Where does Baghdad live?

B. In which place of Baghdad he lives?

47-**At the height of** his rapture, he released his announcements.

A. Where did he release his announcements?

B. At the time of his rupture, did he release announcements?

Other metaphorical expressions can be realized by NPs, these are also mobile since they can be questioned either as whole phrases or part of the phrase, as shown below:

48- Inside **the closed heart** she is sitting.

A. Where is she sitting?

B. Inside which heart is she sitting?

49- He takes **a cold eyed view** of her needs.

A. What does he take of her needs?

B. What kind of view does he take of her needs?

THIRD: METAPHOR AND PASSIVIZATION

Fixed metaphors do not submit to the rules of passivization since metaphoricity made them by a form in which it is hard to break or separate the object from the verb.

Metaphor that consists of **verb + complement** is the most common type. See the following:

50- They **get the milky way** to the sky

51- Spring**colored the grassland.**

These expressions cannot be passivized. The passivization of (50) will be **the milky way was gotten** which has no metaphorical sense, but only the literal sense. Example (51) will be **the grassland was colored** and this does not even make sense of metaphoricity. To the contrary, there is another set of metaphorical expressions that are called mobile. The following examples would illustrate:

52- I have taken **refuge in travelogues**

53- They did much **to break his misfortune**

Note the acceptability of the passive sentences

54- **Refuge in travelogues has been taken**

55-**His misfortune was broken**

It is noticeable that these passive sentences preserve metaphoricity without any loss.

CONCLUSIONS

Generally, metaphor used in poetry not merely as decoration to ornament the poem but also as a technique to declare the meaning of something less known as it compared with something familiar for the sake of enjoyment and to achieve the poet's intention.

Syntactically, metaphor as a structure, it may be concluded that metaphor is a prominent portion of language that is not restricted to one pattern but can occur in different linguistic patterns such as NP, NP+of+NP, VP, Prep.P and so. But each pattern has its own properties that make it differ than the other. Poetically, it may be said that metaphor is the essential device in poetry because it can be used to present a vivid image about the described object. Moreover, it may be argued that all its patterns are used to explain and clarify the poetic intention. As for syntactic behavior, metaphors behave according to the structural context. Sometimes they reject to undergo the rules of pluralization, interrogation or neither passivization nor they can be modified by any means. This group of metaphor can be called 'protected'. Other group of metaphor (unprotected) behaves oppositely. They undergo such grammatical rules and even can be modified.

SUGGESTIONS

The researcher suggests other research conduct the metaphor used in other field of life such as in political discourse, religion discourse, advertisements, media, etc. Other suggestion is that other poetic devices to be syntactically analyzed such as simile, analogy, personification, etc.

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